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ABSTRACT

Reading teachers and the field of reading have received much criticism because the public believes that children are not being taught to read. Some suggestions for letting the public know what children are learning include: using word of mouth; having frequent school visitations; using PTA meetings to advantage; seeking volunteers; inviting press coverage of reading projects; making public exhibits; establishing a speaker's bureau; making a presentation for a broadcast talk show, getting parents turned on to reading; working with public libraries; inviting critics to a meal and showing them what is happening; developing a brief, positive slogan for radio spots; finding sponsors in the community to donate their products; devising contests; publishing a newsletter; sending notes home; organizing a teacher buddy system to give relief to teachers and to help with simple jobs; arranging seminars for parents and community members; organizing a telephone campaign to publicize a few major good characteristics of the reading program; and having tee shirts made with reading slogans. (TJ)

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Spreading the Good News

Linda Mixon Clary

In recent months and years, the field of reading and reading teachers have received much criticism. As Roger Farr has written, "There is no question but an influential portion of the public believes that children aren't being taught to read--and that the blame is being laid on the schools." (Farr, 1978, p. 1) In spite of research findings that show little change in reading test scores over the years or even slight improvement (Farr, Fay and Negley, 1978), the media have inicted us for low SAT scores, producing students who cannot read job applications and poor performances by youngsters on competency tests. Do we deserve all this bad press? Of course not! But our opponents and critics seem to be much louder and more numerous than our proponents. Perhaps what we need to do is to "toot our own horns" and let the public know what we are doing to teach children to read and how well most of them are learning.

Unfortunately, because anyone committed to teaching reading is always busy, such public relations require much time and work that are not easily available. It is not easy to project a positive image when we are already overworked with teaching duties. However, the following list of ideas contains many suggestions--some simple, others requiring time and work, still others that need funding. Perhaps there are one or two that will be useful to you in projecting the positive aspects of our students who are learning to read

1. Use word of mouth.

Before children leave each day, especially young ones, take time to help them recall something good about reading that day--an enjoyable

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story, a good paper, a new book in the library. Encourage the children to tell their parents this good news.

2. Have school visitations.

Many schools have regular school visits only once a year. Instead, have a regular reading visitation period, perhaps once a week, and really work to get parents there. Help them see what their children are working on and give them reinforcement activities to work on at home.

3. Use your PTA meetings to advantage.

Many teachers and parents dread PTA meetings. However, a short portion of each meeting can be devoted to sharing a positive point about the reading program--good tests scores, new materials received, groups or individuals who are performing especially well.

4. Seek volunteers.

Many people who could be very helpful volunteers in our schools are never encouraged enough to start working or are overwhelmed by what they might be asked to do. Seeking volunteers who will help, training them well and teaching teachers how to use them can be a real source of good public relations for reading programs.

5. Advertise.

Most local newspapers will readily send reporters and photographers to cover a significant school event. It is up to the teachers, reading specialist and principal to plan important, worthwhile reading projects and invite press coverage of them. Some activities might include book binding classes, new instructional techniques that are working, and

student book clubs.

6. Exhibit.

Let students make exhibits about their reading. Place these exhibits in store windows, at shopping centers or even on billboards. Such exhibits might include posters to advertise favorite books, photos of school reading activities, and dioramas of good stories.

7. Talk!

Talk about how good your reading program is at every opportunity! Establish a speaker's bureau of people who know "good news" about your program. Get invited to the local Rotary Club or American Association of University Women, garden clubs, church groups. Emphasize your good points and explore possible ways these groups could help you.

8. Become a star!

Work up a good presentation about reading in your school for local television talk shows. Make sure that what you say is interesting and newsworthy. Perhaps you can include children in a skit or photographs of school activities. Appear as often as you can with important information. (A first "good" performance often makes subsequent ones much easier to obtain.)

9. Get parents turned on to reading.

Many children do not like to read because it has never been a part of their home experience. Making parents aware of how little their life styles encourage reading might be done through a questionnaire and then followed up by suggestions of small things to do to promote reading--family outings to the library or bookstores, everyone's reading for 15 minutes a day, family book discussions, having children

read aloud at regular times, etc.

10. Cooperate.

Work with public libraries on reading projects, such as reading emphasis days (or weeks), book clubs, and children's book hours. Take youngsters on field trips to libraries. Encourage teachers to use the public library to obtain books for classroom libraries. Get everyone in the school a library card.

11. Dine the adversaries.

Many people will attend meals who will not attend meetings. Because of labor and expense, keep the meal simple--a continental breakfast, a luncheon salad bar, a spaghetti supper--but invite the worst critics of your reading program and show them what your reading program is succeeding in doing.

12. Bombard the airways.

Get your local radio stations to use a brief, positive motto about reading in regular spots during their programming. An example might be "What have you read today?","Go to the library" or "Have you read a magazine this month?"

13. Find sponsors.

On television, of course, the sponsors pay for programs. In the same way, sponsors can get involved and help pay for reading. There are many ways that this can be done, but some possible avenues include factories that donate their products (carpet, paint, paper) as well as businessmen or civic clubs who give donations for new books, magazine subscriptions, and bookcases.

14. Devise contests.

Contests that involve students and community members can do a lot

toward convincing the public that we are successfully teaching children to read. These contests can be advertised widely through radio, television and newspapers. There are various types of contests but some possibilities might include "Read-ins" where students compete for most hours of reading to the occupants of nursing homes, hospital patients, senior citizens or children in day care centers. Another contest might be to collect paperback books from home and neighbors for a paperback library or book swap room.

15. Publish!

Publish a monthly reading newsletter or newspaper. Let students do most of the work and keep all the news related to good things about reading.

16. Send notes home.

Most teachers can find time to write negative notes home to parents, but they seldom find the same time to send positive notes. Try sending "good news notes" about reading achievements not only to parents, but also grandparents, peers and special adults.

17. Organize a teacher buddy system.

Reading teachers have difficult, intense jobs. Often, just a little help from a friend can make the difference between a horrendous day and a pleasant one. Reading specialists might work toward finding a buddy for every teacher--an older student, a senior citizen, a high school student, perhaps even an administrator. The buddy could drop by occasionally to give the teacher a coffee break, bring a piece of material, stack books or read to the students.

18. Arrange seminars.

Many parents, some teachers and numerous community members have

no idea what reading and learning to read involves. Arrange for brief, interesting seminars to explore these topics. Publicize them well, and invite anyone who will come. Make certain that they are well done and realistic, because they can result in greater help and less criticism. Sometimes they might be held at places where people will be anyway--shopping centers or recreation parks.

19. Hit the phones!

On one specified day or during a particular week, organize a telephone campaign to publicize a few major good characteristics of your reading program. (For example, "Our children are reading more and watching TV less this year.") Such a campaign might take two forms. A taped "Dial Good News" system might be used where a tape or an answering machine "replies" to calls. Another tact would be to have "operators" call individuals. Advertise the campaign in advance. Your calls might be limited to parents in your school or might be aimed at the total community. Such efforts are cheaper than postage and can be effective.

20. Wear the good news!

Since tee shirts are worn so much by youngsters these days, have some printed with reading slogans. (Perhaps "We read more!", "Our school read 4833 books last year," etc.) Sell them or use them as rewards for special achievements, and let the children be walking models for your reading program.

Any one or all twenty of these techniques can be used to disseminate the good, positive features of today's reading programs. There is widespread criticism of today's reading instruction and learning; but those of us involved in the teaching of reading instruction and learning;

but those of us involved in the teaching of reading can combat some of the criticism if we work at our "reading relations."

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